

An Alien Hand



Supplementary Reader in English
for Class VII



राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

0754 – An Alien Hand

Textbook for Class VII

ISBN 81-7450-736-1

First Edition

April 2007 Chaitra 1929

Reprinted

March 2009 Phalguna 1930
January 2010 Magha 1931
November 2010 Kartika 1932
January 2012 Magha 1933
December 2012 Agrahayana 1934
October 2013 Asvina 1935
December 2014 Pausa 1936
December 2015 Agrahayana 1937
March 2017 Phalguna 1938
December 2017 Pausa 1939
December 2018 Agrahayana 1940
August 2019 Bhadrapada 1941
January 2021 Pausa 1942
July 2021 Shravana 1943
November 2021 Kartika 1943

PD 400T RSP

© National Council of Educational
Research and Training, 2007

₹ 40.00

Printed on 80 GSM paper with
NCERT watermark

Published at the Publication Division
by the Secretary, National Council of
Educational Research and Training,
Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi 110
016 and printed at Raj Printers, A-9,
Sector B-2, Tronica City Industrial Area,
Loni, District Ghaziabad - 201 102 (U.P.)

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

- No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.
- This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise disposed of without the publisher's consent, in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published.
- The correct price of this publication is the price printed on this page. Any revised price indicated by a rubber stamp or by a sticker or by any other means is incorrect and should be unacceptable.

OFFICES OF THE PUBLICATION

DIVISION, NCERT

NCERT Campus
Sri Aurobindo Marg
New Delhi 110 016

Phone : 011-26562708

108, 100 Feet Road
Hosdakere Halli Extension
Banashankari III Stage
Bengaluru 560 085

Phone : 080-26725740

Navjivan Trust Building
P.O. Navjivan
Ahmedabad 380 014

Phone : 079-27541446

CWC Campus
Opp. Dhankal Bus Stop
Panighati
Kolkata 700 114

Phone : 033-25530454

CWC Complex
Maligaon
Guwahati 781 021

Phone : 0361-2674869

Publication Team

Head, Publication : *Anup Kumar Rajput*
Division
Chief Editor : *Shweta Uppal*
Chief Production : *Arun Chitkara*
Officer
Chief Business : *Vipin Dewan*
Manager
Editor : *Vijayam Sankarnaranayanan*
Production Assistant : *Rajesh Pippal*

Cover and Layout

Blue Fish

Illustrations

Bhushan Shaligram

Foreword

THE National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children's life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community. The syllabi and textbooks developed on the basis of NCF signify an attempt to implement this basic idea. They also attempt to discourage rote learning and the maintenance of sharp boundaries between different subject areas. We hope these measures will take us significantly further in the direction of a child-centred system of education outlined in the National Policy of Education (1986).

The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults. Treating the prescribed textbook as the sole basis of examination is one of the key reasons why other resources and sites of learning are ignored. Inculcating creativity and initiative is possible if we perceive and treat children as participants in learning, not as receivers of a fixed body of knowledge.

These aims imply considerable change in school routines and mode of functioning. Flexibility in the daily time-table is as necessary as rigour in implementing the annual calendar so that the required number of teaching days are actually devoted to teaching. The methods used for teaching and evaluation will also determine how effective this supplementary reader proves for making children's life at school a happy experience rather than a source of stress or boredom. Syllabus designers have tried to address the problem of curricular burden by restructuring and reorienting knowledge at different stages with greater consideration for child psychology and the





time available for teaching. The book attempts to enhance this endeavour by giving higher priority and space to opportunities for contemplation and wondering, discussion in small groups, and activities requiring hands-on experience.

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) appreciates the hard work done by the textbook development committee responsible for this book. We wish to thank the Chairperson of the advisory group in languages, Professor Namwar Singh, and the Chief Advisor for this book, Professor R. Amritavalli for guiding the work of this committee. Several teachers contributed to the development of this book; we are grateful to their principals for making this possible. We are indebted to the institutions and organisations which have generously permitted us to draw upon their resources, materials and personnel. We are especially grateful to the members of the National Monitoring Committee, appointed by the Department of Secondary and Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development under the Chairpersonship of Professor Mrinal Miri and Professor G.P. Deshpande for their valuable time and contribution. As an organisation committed to systemic reform and continuous improvement in the quality of its products, NCERT welcomes comments and suggestions which will enable us to undertake further revision and refinements.

Director

New Delhi
20 November 2006

National Council of Educational
Research and Training

A Note for the Teacher

THE main objective of this supplementary reader is to promote among learners the habit of reading independently with interest, understanding and enjoyment. It seeks to enable them to read independently in the sense that they would not expect the book to be taken up page by page in the classroom. They would rather read it on their own and later share and confirm their responses and appreciation with the teacher and the peer group through discussions, questions and, wherever possible, even role-play.

The book contains ten pieces. Each piece has been divided into two or three manageable sections, each section briefly summarised in point form without revealing crucial turns and twists of the storyline, thus sustaining readers' curiosity and interest. While-reading 'Comprehension Check,' given at the end of sections, is a recall of what has been read and understood so far.

This format is being tried to make comprehension easier and concentration keener. Each piece is also followed by a set of questions as aids to understanding and, at many places, topics for discussion in groups. All questions should be attempted orally before well-formulated answers are put down on paper. Discussion on related topics should be encouraged so that learners get an opportunity to go beyond the book and feel inspired to reach hitherto undiscovered vistas of knowledge and pleasure.

The stories, amply illustrated, deal with themes of cooperation, compassion, respect and love for flora and fauna, sound decision-making, science fiction, peace and harmony. It is hoped that young readers will find the book enjoyable and rewarding, and will feel motivated to read extensively on their own to become proficient readers in the years to come.



THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a **[SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC]** and to secure to all its citizens :

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the **[unity and integrity of the Nation]**;

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949 do **HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.**

1. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Sovereign Democratic Republic" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)
2. Subs. by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976, Sec.2, for "Unity of the Nation" (w.e.f. 3.1.1977)

Textbook Development Committee

CHAIRPERSON, ADVISORY GROUP IN LANGUAGES

Professor Namwar Singh, formerly *Chairman*, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

CHIEF ADVISOR

R. Amritavalli, *Professor*, English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad

CHIEF COORDINATOR

Ram Janma Sharma, Former *Professor and Head*, Department of Education in Languages, NCERT, New Delhi

MEMBERS

Beena Sugathan, *PGT (English)*, Loreto Convent, Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi

Madhavi Gayathri Raman, *Lecturer*, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

Rooma Palit, *PGT (English)*, Delhi Public School, Nalcognar Angul, Odisha

Shyamala Kumaradas, (formerly of CIEFL), Hyderabad, 3C Sheetal Haven, Peringavu, Trichur

MEMBER-COORDINATOR

Nasiruddin Khan, Former *Reader* in English, Department of Education in Languages, NCERT, New Delhi





Acknowledgements

THE National Council of Educational Research and Training is grateful to Professor M.L. Tickoo, formerly of the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, and the Regional Language Centre, Singapore for going through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions. Special thanks are due to Professor R. Amritavalli for her overall monitoring and assistance as Chief Advisor.

For permission to reproduce copyright material in this book NCERT would like to thank the following: Gita Wolf and Anoushka Ravishankar for 'Children at work' from *Trash—On Raggicker Children and Recycling*, Tara Publishing & Books for Change, Chennai, 1999; M.S. Bela Raja, *Editor*, for 'Treasure Within' from *Sparsh—A Newsletter from The Resource Centre, The Valley School, Bengaluru*, Vol : 003, July 2001; Ruskin Bond for 'The Fight' from *Time Stops at Shamli and Other Stories*, Penguin India, 1989; and Jayant Narlikar for 'The Comet' from *Tales of the Future*, Witness Books, Delhi, 2005.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders. We apologise for some omissions, and will gratefully acknowledge them as soon as they can be traced.

Special thanks are also due to the Publication Department, NCERT, for its support. NCERT also acknowledges the contributions made by Parash Ram Kaushik, *Incharge*, Computer Resource Centre; Razi Ahmad and Inder Kumar, *DTP Operators*; and Mathew John, *Proof Reader*.

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	iii
<i>A Note for the Teacher</i>	v
1. The Tiny Teacher	1
2. Bringing up Kari	7
3. The Desert	15
4. The Cop and the Anthem	20
5. Golu Grows a Nose	30
6. I Want Something in a Cage	36
7. Chandni	43
8. The Bear Story	52
9. A Tiger in the House	58
10. An Alien Hand	66

not to © NCERT
be republished



0754CH01

1

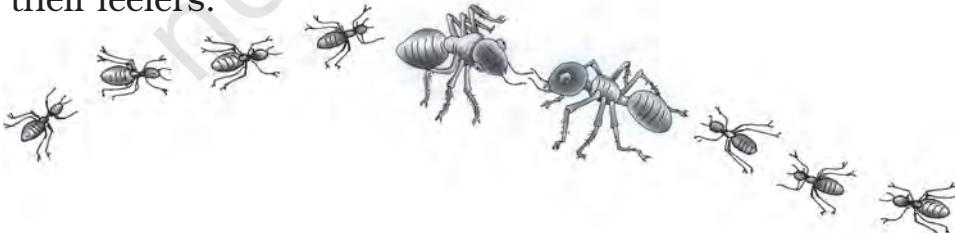
The Tiny Teacher



- ★ Though so very small, the ant is unbelievably intelligent and hard-working.
- ★ Among the various kinds, the commonest ant is black or red.
- ★ Ants live in comfortable homes called 'anthills'.

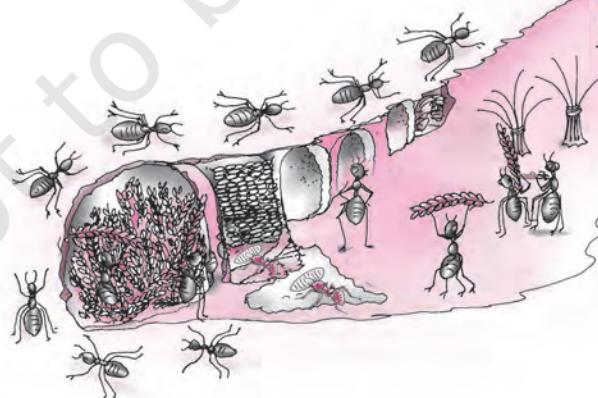
NAME the smallest insect you have seen, and the wisest. Is it the fly? No, it isn't. Is it the mosquito? No, not the mosquito. Then it must be the worm. No, none of these. It is the ant—the commonest, the smallest but the wisest insect. The story of an ant's life sounds almost untrue. But people have kept ants as pets, and have watched their daily behaviour closely. So we know a number of facts about this tiny, hard-working and intelligent creature.

An ant uses its feelers or antennae to 'talk' to other ants by passing messages through them. Watch a row of ants moving up or down the wall. Each ant greets all the others coming from the opposite direction by touching their feelers.





There are many kinds of ants. The commonest among them are the black or red ones. We have seen them since we were children, but haven't paid enough attention to them. Where do they live? In their comfortable homes called 'nests' or 'anthills'. Each has hundreds of little rooms and passages. In some of these rooms the queen ant lays eggs. Others are nurseries for the young ones (called 'grubs'). Workers have their



reserved quarters. They spend most of their time searching for food. Some rooms serve as storehouses for this food. Soldiers have separate barracks. No worker has ever tried to live in a soldier's house; no soldier has ever gone out searching for food. No worker or soldier or cleaner has ever harmed a grub. So you see, an ant's life is very peaceful. Each does its share of work intelligently and bravely, and never fights with other members of the group.

Comprehension Check

1. The story of an ant's life sounds *almost untrue*.

The italicised phrase means

- (i) highly exaggerated.
- (ii) too remarkable to be true.
- (iii) not based on facts.

2. Complete the following sentences.

(i) An ant is the smallest, _____

(ii) We know a number of facts about an ant's life because

3. In what ways is an ant's life peaceful?

- ★ The queen ant has a pair of wings, which she casts off before she begins to lay eggs.
- ★ Eggs hatch and become grubs, grubs change into cocoons, and cocoons break to bring forth complete ants.
- ★ The life of an ordinary ant in the anthill is a book which many of us seldom open.

The queen is the mother of the entire population of the colony. It lives for about fifteen years. It has a pair of wings,





but bites them off after its 'wedding' flight. This flight takes place on a hot summer day. The queen leaves the nest and goes out to meet a male ant, or drone, high up in the air. On its return to earth, it gets rid of its wings and then does nothing but lay eggs.

Eggs hatch and grubs come out. Soldiers guard them. Workers feed and clean them, and also carry them about daily for airing, exercise and sunshine. Two or three weeks



later, grubs become cocoons and lie without food or activity for three weeks more. Then the cocoons break and perfect ants appear. Now it's time for teaching and training. New ants learn their duties from old ants as workers, soldiers, builders, cleaners, etc. After a few weeks' training, the small ants are ready to go out into the big world of work.

An anthill is a home not only for ants but also for some other creatures—beetles, lesser breeds of ants and the greenfly. Why do ants want these alien creatures to live in their nests? For several reasons: some give off smell pleasant to the ants' senses;



others give sweet juices; and some are just pets or playthings like cats and dogs to human beings. The greenfly is the ants' cow. The ants train it to give honeydew (like milk) with a touch of their antennae. They milk it just as we milk the cow.

Have humans learned as much as ants have? Perhaps they have, but they haven't put their learning to good use. They may still learn a few things from this tiny teacher—hard work, sense of duty and discipline, cleanliness, care for the young ones, and, above all, a firm loyalty to the land where they live.



Comprehension Check

1. How long does it take for a grub to become a complete ant?
2. Why do the worker ants carry the grubs about?
3. What jobs are new ants trained for?
4. Name some other creatures that live in anthills.
5. Mention three things we can learn from the 'tiny teacher'. Give reasons for choosing these items.

5
The Tiny Teacher

Exercises

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. (i) What problems are you likely to face if you keep ants as pets?
(ii) When a group of bees finds nectar, it informs other bees of its location, quantity, etc. through dancing. Can you guess what ants communicate to their fellow ants by touching one another's feelers?

2. Complete the following poem with words from the box below. Then recite the poem.

Soldiers live in barracks
And birds in _____,
Much like a snake that rests
In a _____. No horse is able
To sleep except in a _____.
And a dog lives well,
Mind you, only in a _____.
To say 'hi' to an ant, if you will,
You may have to climb an _____.

hole kennel nests anthill stable



A Matter of Tongue

- In humans the tongue is the organ of taste. It also helps in chewing, swallowing and speaking.
- Some animals like the frog and the chameleon use the tongue to catch prey. The chameleon's tongue is so long that it keeps it folded in the mouth—but it can flick it in and out at lightning speed.
- The snake uses its tongue to smell. The reptile flickers its tongue in and out, each time carrying molecules from its surroundings to an organ (called 'Jacobson's organ') in the roof of its mouth.
- The blue whale has the largest tongue which can weigh as much as an elephant.



0754CH02

2

Bringing up Kari



- ★ Kari, a five-month-old baby elephant, lives and grows up with his nine-year-old friend and keeper.
- ★ Kari doesn't eat much—just about sixteen kilograms of delicious twigs a day.
- ★ Playful and sensitive, Kari saves a boy from drowning.

KARI, the elephant, was five months old when he was given to me to take care of. I was nine years old and I could reach his back if I stood on tiptoe. He seemed to remain that high for nearly two years. We grew together; that is probably why I never found out just how tall he was. He lived in a pavilion, under a thatched roof which rested on thick tree stumps so that it could not fall in when Kari bumped against the poles as he moved about.

One of the first things Kari did was to save the life of a boy. Kari did not eat much but he nevertheless needed forty pounds of twigs a day to chew and play with. Every day I used to take him to the river in the morning for his bath. He would lie down on the sand bank while I rubbed him with the clean sand of the river for an hour. After that he would lie in the water for a long time. On coming out his skin would be shining like ebony, and he would squeal

squeal: cry/trumpet



with pleasure as I rubbed water down his back. Then I would take him by the ear, because that is the easiest way to lead an elephant, and leave him on the edge of the jungle while I went into the forest to get some luscious twigs for his dinner. One has to have a very sharp hatchet to cut down these twigs; it takes half an hour to sharpen the hatchet because if a twig is mutilated an elephant will not touch it.

It was not an easy job to get twigs and saplings for Kari. I had to climb all kinds of trees to get the most delicate and tender twigs. As he was very fond of the young branches of the banyan tree which grows like a cathedral of leaves and branches, I was gathering some, one spring day in March, when I suddenly heard Kari calling to me in the distance. As he was still very young, the call was more like that of a baby than an elephant. I thought somebody was hurting

luscious: tasty and sweet smelling **hatchet:** small axe **mutilated:** torn awkwardly/disfigured

him, so I came down from my tree and ran very fast to the edge of the forest where I had left him, but he was not there.

I looked all over, but I could not find him.

I went near the edge of the water, and I saw a black something struggling above its surface. Then it rose higher and it was the trunk of my elephant. I thought he was drowning. I was helpless because I could not jump into the water and save the four hundred pounds of him since he was much higher than I. But I saw his back rise above the water and the moment he caught my eye, he began to trumpet and struggle up to the shore. Then, still trumpeting, he pushed me into the water and, as I fell into the stream, I saw a boy lying flat on the bottom of the river. He had not altogether touched bottom but was somewhat afloat. I came to the surface of the water to take my breath and there Kari was standing, his feet planted in the sand bank and his trunk stretched out like a hand waiting for mine. I dived down again and pulled the body of the drowning boy to the surface but, not being a good swimmer, I could not swim ashore and the slow current was already dragging me down.

Seeing us drift by in the current, Kari, who was usually slow and ponderous, suddenly darted down like a hawk and came halfway into the water where I saw him stretch out his trunk again. I raised up my hand to catch it and it slipped. I found myself going under the water again, but



this time I found that the water was not very deep so I sank to the bottom of the river and doubled my feet under me and then suddenly kicked the river bed and so shot upwards like an arrow, in spite of the fact that I was holding the drowning boy with my hand. As my body rose above the water, I felt a lasso around my neck. This frightened me; I thought some water animal was going to swallow me. I heard Kari squealing, and I knew it was his trunk about my neck. He pulled us both ashore.

- ★ **Kari becomes fond of ripe bananas.**
- ★ **He believes in self-help, much to the discomfort of his friend.**
- ★ **With quiet dignity, Kari accepts the chiding he knows he deserves.**

Kari was like a baby. He had to be trained to be good and if you did not tell him when he was naughty, he was up to more mischief than ever.

For instance, one day, somebody gave him some bananas to eat. Very soon he developed a great love for ripe bananas. We used to keep large plates of fruit on a table near a window in the dining-room. One day all the bananas on that table disappeared and my family blamed the servants for eating all the fruit in the house. A few days later the fruit disappeared again; this time the blame was put on me, and I knew I had not done it. It made me very angry with my parents and the servants, for I was sure they had taken all the fruit. The next time the fruit disappeared, I found a banana all smashed up in Kari's pavilion. This surprised me very much, for I had never seen fruit there and, as you know, he had always lived on twigs.

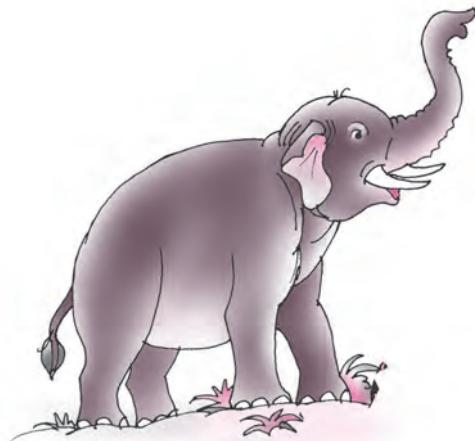
Next day, while I was sitting in the dining-room wondering whether I should take some fruit from the table

lasso: rope with a noose at the end



without my parents' permission, a long, black thing, very much like a snake, suddenly came through the window and disappeared with all the bananas. I was very much frightened because I had never seen snakes eat bananas and I thought it must be a terrible snake that would sneak in and take fruit. I crept out of the room and with great fear in my heart ran out of the house, feeling sure that the snake would come back into the house, eat all the fruit and kill all of us.

As I went out, I saw Kari's back disappearing in the direction of the pavilion and I was so frightened that I wanted his company to cheer me up. I ran after him into the pavilion and I found him there eating bananas. I stood still in astonishment; the bananas were lying strewn all around him. He stretched out his trunk and reached for one far away from where he was standing. That instant the



trunk looked like a black snake, and I realised that Kari was the thief. I went to him, pulled him out by the ear and joyously showed my parents that it was Kari and not I that had eaten all the fruit these many weeks. Then I scolded him, for elephants understand words as well as

children, and I said to him, "Next time I see you stealing fruit, you will be whipped." He knew that we were all angry with him, even the servants. His pride was so injured that he never stole another thing from the dining-room. And from then on, if anybody gave him any fruit, he always squealed as if to thank them.

An elephant is willing to be punished for having done wrong, but if you punish him without any reason, he will remember it and pay you back in your own coin.

- ★ **Kari is a fast learner.**
- ★ **He masters all signals and sounds he is taught.**
- ★ **There is one lesson, though, that an elephant takes five years to learn. Kari is no exception.**

An elephant must be taught when to sit down, when to walk, when to go fast, and when to go slow. You teach him these things as you teach a child. If you say 'Dhat' and pull him by the ear, he will gradually learn to sit down. Similarly, if you say 'Mali' and pull his trunk forward, he will gradually learn that it is the signal to walk.

Kari learned 'Mali' after three lessons, but it took him three weeks to learn 'Dhat'. He was no good at sitting down. And do you know why an elephant should be taught to sit down? Because he grows taller and taller than you who take care of him, so that when he is two or three years old,

you can only reach his back with a ladder. It is, therefore, better to teach him to sit down by saying 'Dhat' so that you can climb upon his back, for who would want to carry a ladder around all the time?

The most difficult thing to teach an elephant is the master call. He generally takes five years to learn it properly. The master call is a strange hissing, howling sound, as if a snake and a tiger were fighting each other, and you have to make that kind of noise in his ear. And do you know what you expect an elephant to do when you give him the master call? If you are lost in the jungle and there is no way out, and everything is black except the stars above, you dare not stay very long anywhere. The only thing to do then is to give the master call and at once the elephant pulls down the tree in front of him with his trunk. This frightens all the animals away. As the tree comes crashing down, monkeys wake from their sleep and run from branch to branch—



you can see them in the moonlight—and you can almost see the stags running in all directions below. You can hear the growl of the tiger in the distance. Even he is frightened. Then the elephant pulls down the next tree and the next, and the next. Soon you will find that he has made a road right through the jungle straight to your house.

DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI

(from *Kari, the Elephant*)

Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. The enclosure in which Kari lived had a thatched roof that lay on thick tree stumps. Examine the illustration of Kari's pavilion on page 8 and say why it was built that way.
2. Did Kari enjoy his morning bath in the river? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Finding good twigs for Kari took a long time. Why?
4. Why did Kari push his friend into the stream?
5. Kari was like a baby. What are the main points of comparison?
6. Kari helped himself to all the bananas in the house without anyone noticing it. How did he do it?
7. Kari learnt the commands to sit and to walk. What were the instructions for each command?
8. What is "the master call"? Why is it the most important signal for an elephant to learn?



0754CH03

3

The Desert



- ★ A desert is generally without water and vegetation.
- ★ A green patch with fresh water and green trees in the middle of a vast desert is a beautiful sight.
- ★ A desert may be too hot or too cold.

THOSE of us who live in regions covered with forests and surrounded by hills may find it difficult to imagine what a desert is really like. The popular belief is that it is an endless stretch of sand where no rain falls and, therefore, no vegetation grows. It is dry, hot, waterless and without shelter. But this is not entirely correct. For those who have studied it, the desert can be a beautiful place. It is the home of a variety of people, animals and plants that have learnt to live under very hot and dry conditions.

True, the ground is not always hidden by a cover of grass, plants and trees as it is in other climates. But whenever it rains, which is rare, desert flowers bloom and the sight can be as rewarding as that of any tropical garden.

A desert is not always a flat, unchanging wasteland of dry sand. It may have mountains and hills. It may have an oasis, big or small. An oasis is like a green island in the middle of a desert where a spring or a well gives plants and trees a better

regions: areas



chance to grow. A desert may be hot like the Thar or cold like Ladakh. But, generally speaking, if a place has little or no water and vegetation, people usually call it a desert.

Some deserts are almost totally without water. In such places, strong winds blow raising heaps of sand and depositing them as mounds. These are called 'sand dunes' that shift and move endlessly across the desert. Few plants can survive on such dry, shifting sands.

Comprehension Check

1. From the first paragraph
 - (i) pick out two phrases which describe the desert as most people believe it is;
 - (ii) pick out two phrases which describe the desert as specialists see it.

Which do you think is an apt description, and why?

mounds: big heaps

2. The phrases on the left in the following box occur in the text. Match each of them with a phrase on the right.

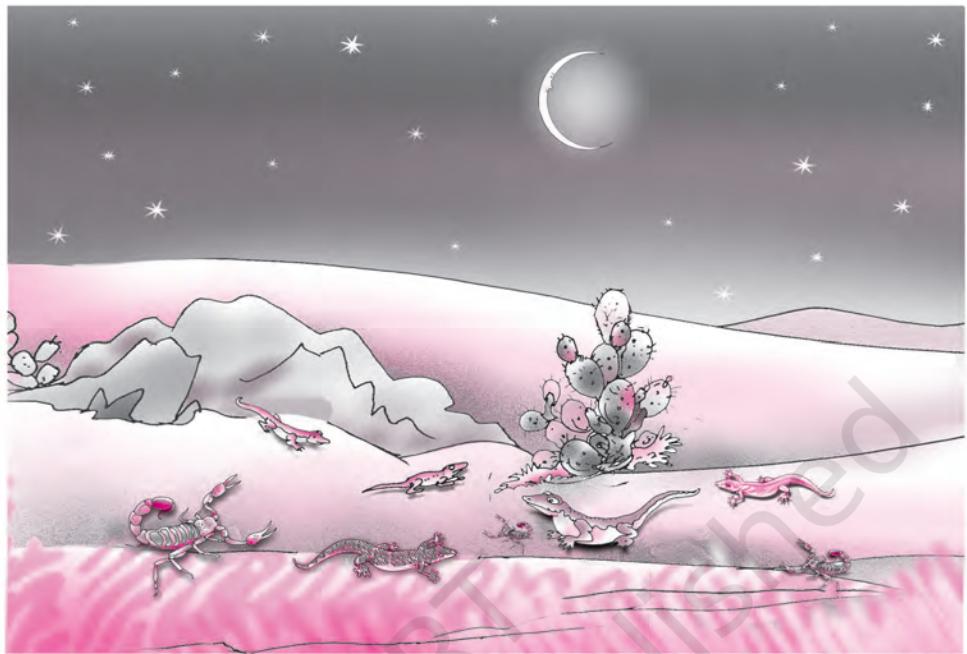
(i) an endless stretch of sand	• fertile place with water and plants in a desert
(ii) waterless and without shelter	• not visible because the grass is thick
(iii) an oasis	• nothing but sand as far as one can see
(iv) hidden by a cover of grass	• no water and no shade



- ★ Desert plants and animals learn to require much less water than most plants and animals.
- ★ The camel is a typical desert animal.
- ★ Smaller desert animals have unusual means of satisfying their need for water.

All living things need water in order to survive. The few plants and animals that live in deserts have developed the ability to require less water than most plants and animals. The camel, popularly known as the 'ship of the desert', can drink a lot of water at one time. Camels can do without





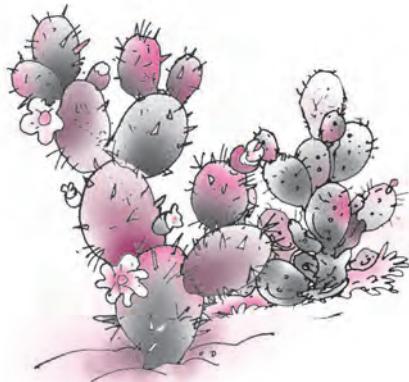
water for days together. The reason is they sweat very little. We sweat because we must keep our body temperature constant. We sweat when it gets hot, and this cools the body. Camels can stand high body temperature. They don't need to sweat and can, therefore, retain the water they drink for long periods of time.

The smaller desert animals do not drink water. They burrow underground during the hot day and come out at night to eat. Some of them eat other animals and get the water they need from the moisture in the meat. Others eat plants and seeds and get the water they need from plant juices.

Desert plants also adapt themselves to the life they lead. Cactus plants store water in their thick stems. Their roots lie close to the surface of the ground and quickly absorb the moisture from the light rains that occasionally fall. The major feature of all deserts is, of course, dryness and

burrow: move underground by digging **moisture:** wetness

adapt: change **absorb:** take in completely



variations of temperature. In humid climates, the moisture in the air acts like a blanket and protects the earth's surface from the hot rays of the sun. The absence of this blanket in desertlands causes the desert to heat up rapidly during the day and to cool off rapidly at night.

Deserts are an important part of nature's great plan. They are there like the dense forests and the deep oceans. Just because they are hot and dry, one should not look upon them as useless parts of the earth.

Comprehension Check

1. A camel can do without water for days together. What is the reason given in the text?
2. How do the smaller desert animals fulfil their need for water?
3. In a desert the temperature rises during the day and falls rapidly at night. Why?

19

The Desert

Exercises

Do the following activities in groups.

1. Describe a desert in your own way. Write a paragraph and read it aloud to your classmates.
2. Go to the library and collect information about the lifestyle of people in desert areas — their food, clothes, work, social customs, etc. Share this information with the group.

variations: changes **humid:** containing moisture



0754CH04

4

The Cop and the Anthem



Before you read

Have you ever found yourself in a situation in which what happened was the opposite of what you expected? If so, you are familiar with the 'irony' of the situation, which is often embarrassing. The story that you are going to read has a number of such situations.

- ★ Soapy is a homeless, jobless man.
- ★ Winter is fast approaching and Soapy must have a place to stay.
- ★ Soapy comes to a decision, at last.

SOAPY moved restlessly on his seat in Madison Square. There are certain signs to show that winter is coming. Birds begin to fly south. People want new warm coats. And Soapy moves restlessly on his seat in the park. When you see these signs, you know that winter is near.

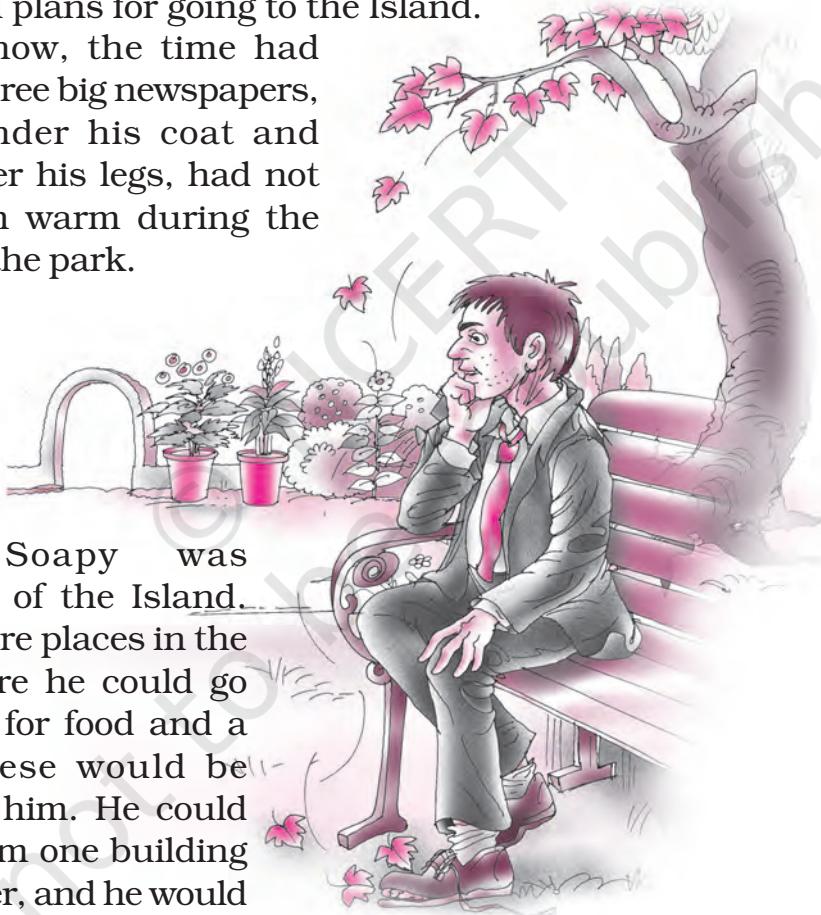
A dead leaf fell at Soapy's feet. That was a special sign for him that winter was coming. It was time for all who lived in Madison Square to prepare.

Soapy's mind now realised that fact. The time had come. He had to find some way to take care of himself during the cold weather. And, therefore, he moved restlessly on his seat.

Soapy's hopes for the winter were not very high. He was not thinking of sailing away on a ship. He was not thinking of southern skies, or of the Bay of Naples. Three months in the prison on Blackwell's Island was what he wanted. Three months of food every day and a bed every night, three months safe from the cold north wind and safe from cops. This is what Soapy wanted most in the world.

For years, Blackwell's Island had been his winter home. Richer New Yorkers made their plans to go to Florida or to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea each winter. Soapy made his small plans for going to the Island.

And now, the time had come. Three big newspapers, some under his coat and some over his legs, had not kept him warm during the night in the park.



So Soapy was thinking of the Island. There were places in the city where he could go and ask for food and a bed. These would be given to him. He could move from one building to another, and he would

southern skies: warmer places **Blackwell's Island:** name of a prison (If Soapy went to prison, the government would look after his food and stay.) **cop:** policeman (American English)

be taken care of through the winter. But he liked Blackwell's Island better.

Soapy's spirit was proud. If he went to any of these places, there were certain things he had to do. In one way or another, he would have to pay for what they gave him. They would not ask him for money. But they would make him wash his whole body. They would make him answer questions. They would want to know everything about his life.

No. Prison was better than that. The prison had rules that he would have to follow. But in prison, a gentleman's own life was still his own life.

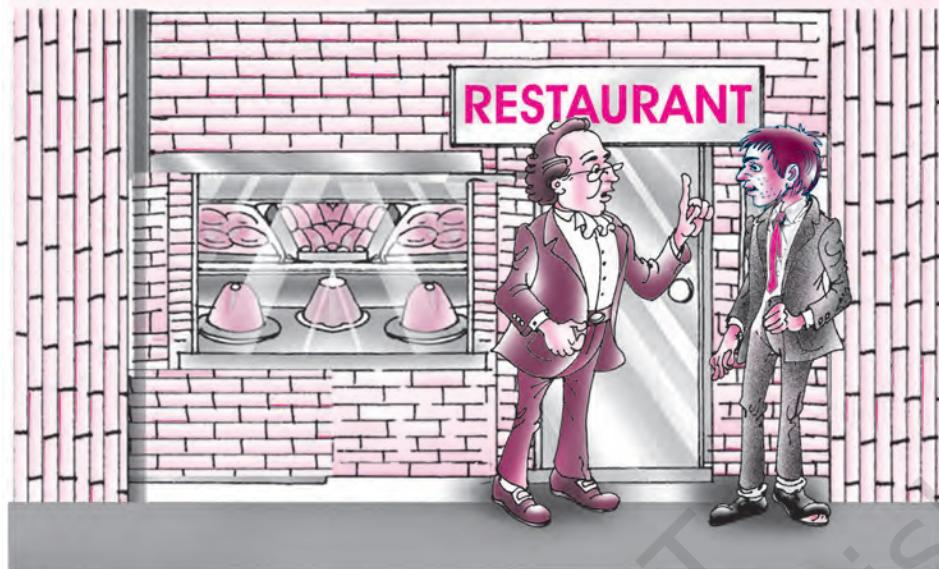
Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once began to move towards his desire.

- ★ **Soapy does his best to be on the wrong side of the law.**
- ★ **He tries three tricks, all in vain.**
- ★ **The fear that no cop will ever catch him makes him sick at heart.**

There were many easy ways of doing this. The most pleasant way was to go and have a good dinner at some fine restaurant. Then he would say that he had no money to pay. And then a cop would be called. It would all be done very quietly. The cop would arrest him. He would be taken to a judge. The judge would do the rest.

Soapy left his seat and walked slowly out of Madison Square to the place where the great street called Broadway and Fifth Avenue meet. He went across this wide space and started north on Broadway. He stopped at a large and brightly lighted restaurant. This was where the best food and the best people in the best clothes appeared every evening.

Soapy believed that above his legs he looked all right. His face was clean. His coat was good enough. If he could get to a table, he believed that success would be his. The



part of him that would be seen above the table would look all right. The waiter would bring him what he asked for.

He began thinking of what he would like to eat. In his mind he could see the whole dinner. The cost would not be too high. He did not want the restaurant people to feel any real anger. But the dinner would leave him filled and happy for the journey to his winter home.

But as Soapy put his foot inside the restaurant door, the head waiter saw his broken old shoes and the torn clothes that covered his legs. Strong and ready hands turned Soapy around and moved him quietly and quickly outside again.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that this most easy way to the Island was not to be his. He must think of some other way of getting there.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue was a shop with a wide glass window, bright with electric lights. Soapy picked up a big stone and threw it through the glass. People came running around the corner. A cop was the first among them. Soapy stood still, and he smiled when he saw the cop.



“Where’s the man that did that?” asked the cop.

“Don’t you think that I might have done it?” said Soapy. He was friendly and happy. What he wanted was coming towards him.

But the cop’s mind would not consider Soapy. Men who break windows do not stop there to talk to cops. They run away as fast as they can. The cop saw a man further along the street, running. He ran after him. And Soapy, sick at heart, walked slowly away. He had failed two times.

Across the street was another restaurant. It was not so fine as the one on Broadway. The people who went there were not so rich. Its food was not so good. Into this Soapy took his old shoes and his torn clothes, and no one stopped him. He sat down at a table and was soon eating a big dinner.

When he had finished, he said that he had no money.

"Get busy and call a cop," said Soapy. "And don't keep a gentleman waiting."

"No cop for you," said the waiter. He called another waiter.

The two waiters threw Soapy upon his left ear on the hard street outside.

He stood up slowly, one part at a time, and beat the dust from his clothes. Prison seemed only a happy dream. The Island seemed very far away.

A cop who was standing near laughed and walked away. Soapy started moving again. When he stopped, he was near several theatres. In this part of the city, streets are brighter and hearts are more joyful than in other parts. Women and men in rich warm coats moved happily in the winter air.

A sudden fear caught Soapy. No cop was going to arrest him.



- ★ Soapy tries his luck twice again, but cops remain indifferent as ever.
- ★ Soapy is suddenly reminded of his childhood home and mother, and resolves to turn over a new leaf.
- ★ Feeling a hand on his arm, Soapy turns around to see the broad face of a cop.

Then he came to another cop standing in front of a big theatre. He thought of something else to try.

He began to shout as if he had too much to drink. His voice was as loud as he could make it. He danced, he cried out.

And the cop turned his back to Soapy, and said to a man standing near him, "It's one of those college boys. He won't hurt anything. We have orders to let them shout."

Soapy was quiet. Was no cop going to touch him? He began to think of the Island as if it were as far away as a star. He pulled his thin coat around him. The wind was very cold.

Then he saw a man in a shop buying a newspaper. The man's umbrella stood beside the door. Soapy stepped inside the shop, took the umbrella, and walked slowly away.

The man followed him quickly.

"My umbrella," he said.

"Oh, is it?" said Soapy. "Why don't you call a cop? I took it. Your umbrella! Why don't you call a cop? There's one standing at the corner."

The man walked more slowly. Soapy did the same. But





he had a feeling that he was going to fail again. The cop looked at the two men.

“I—” said the umbrella man “—that is — you know how these things happen; if that’s your umbrella, I’m very sorry. I found it this morning in a restaurant. If you say it’s yours I hope you’ll—”

“It’s mine!” cried Soapy, with anger in his voice.

The umbrella man hurried away. The cop helped a lady across the street. Soapy walked east. He threw the umbrella as far as he could throw it. He talked to himself about cops and what he thought of them. Because he wished to be arrested, they seemed to believe he was like a king who could do no wrong.

At last, Soapy came to one of the quiet streets on the side of the city. He turned here and began to walk south toward Madison Square. He was going home, although home was only a seat in a park.

But at a very quiet corner, Soapy stopped. Here was his old childhood home. Through one window, he could see a soft light shining. That had been his living room, where he had spent many happy peaceful moments. Sweet music came to Soapy’s ears and seemed to hold him there.

The moon was above, peaceful and bright. There were few people passing. He could hear birds high above him. And the music that came from the room held Soapy there, for he had known it well long ago. In those days, his life contained such things as mothers and flowers and high hopes and friends and clean thoughts and clean clothes.

There was a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He saw with sick fear how he had fallen. He saw his worthless days, his wrong desires, his dead hopes, the lost power of his mind.

And also, in a moment, his heart answered this change in his soul. He would fight to change his life. He would pull himself up, out of the mud. He would make a man of himself again.



There was time. He was young enough. He would find his old purpose in life, and follow it. That sweet music had changed him. Tomorrow he would find work. A man had once offered him a job. He would find that man tomorrow. He would be somebody in the world. He would. Soapy felt a hand on his arm. He looked quickly around into the broad face of a cop.

“What are you doing hanging around here?” asked the cop.

“Nothing,” said Soapy.

“You think I believe that?” said the cop.

Full of his new strength, Soapy began to argue. And it is not wise to argue with a New York cop.

“Come along,” said the cop.

“Three months prison on Blackwell’s Island,” said the judge to Soapy next morning.

O. HENRY

Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. What are some of the signs of approaching winter referred to in the text?
2. Write 'True' or 'False' against each of the following.
 - (i) Soapy did not want to go to prison. _____
 - (ii) Soapy had been to prison several times. _____
 - (iii) It was not possible for Soapy to survive in the city through the winter. _____
 - (iv) Soapy hated to answer questions of a personal nature. _____
3. What was Soapy's first plan? Why did it not work?
4. "But the cop's mind would not consider Soapy". What did the cop not consider, and why?
5. "We have orders to let them shout". What is the policeman referring to?
6. Write 'True' or 'False' against each of the following.
 - (i) Soapy stole a man's umbrella. _____
 - (ii) The owner of the umbrella offered to give it to Soapy. _____
 - (iii) The man had stolen the umbrella that was now Soapy's. _____
 - (iv) Soapy threw away the umbrella. _____
7. "There was a sudden and wonderful change in his soul". What brought about the change in Soapy?

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Suppose no cop came at the end. What would Soapy's life be like through the winter?
2. Retell an episode in the story which is a good example of irony in a situation.



0754CH05

5

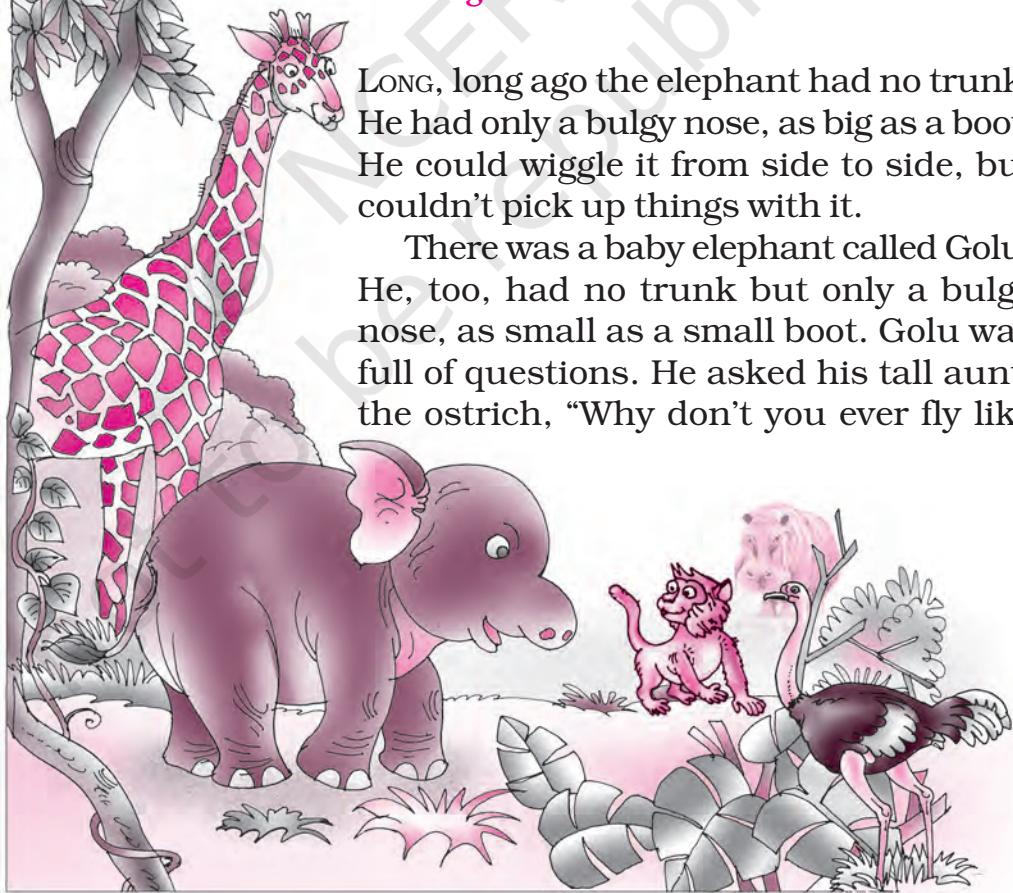
Golu Grows a Nose



- ★ There was a time when the elephant had no trunk.
- ★ Golu, a baby elephant with a bulgy nose, is full of questions.
- ★ He goes to the Limpopo river to find out more about the crocodile's eating habits.

LONG, long ago the elephant had no trunk. He had only a bulgy nose, as big as a boot. He could wiggle it from side to side, but couldn't pick up things with it.

There was a baby elephant called Golu. He, too, had no trunk but only a bulgy nose, as small as a small boot. Golu was full of questions. He asked his tall aunt, the ostrich, "Why don't you ever fly like



other birds?" Then he asked his tall uncle, the giraffe, "What makes your skin so spotty?" He asked his huge uncle, the hippopotamus, "Why are your eyes always so red?" He asked his hairy uncle, the baboon, "Why do melons taste like melons?" The ostrich, the giraffe, the hippopotamus and the baboon had no answers to Golu's questions. "Golu is a naughty baby," they said. "He asks such difficult questions."

One day Golu met the mynah bird sitting in the middle of a bush, and he asked her, "What does the crocodile have for dinner?" The mynah said, "Go to the banks of the great, grassy Limpopo river and find out."

Golu went home. He took a hundred sugar canes, fifty dozen bananas and twenty-five melons. Then he said to his family, "Goodbye. I'm going to the great, grassy Limpopo river. I'll find out what the crocodile has for dinner." He had never seen a crocodile, and didn't know what one looked like.

He met a python and asked him, "Have you ever seen a crocodile? What does he look like? What does he have for dinner?"

31

Golu Grows a Nose



The python uncoiled himself from the branch of a tree but said nothing. Golu politely helped him to coil around the branch again and said goodbye to him.

- ★ **Golu meets the crocodile face to face.**
- ★ **He gets the python's help when he needs it most.**
- ★ **Golu grows a long and useful nose.**

Golu moved on, eating sugar canes, bananas and melons. After a few days he reached the very edge of the great, grassy Limpopo river. On the bank of the river he saw a log of wood.

It was really the crocodile who winked at him. "Excuse me," said Golu. "Have you ever seen a crocodile?"

The crocodile winked again and lifted half his tail out of the mud. "Come here, little one," said the crocodile. "Why do you ask such questions?"

"I want to know..."

"Come close, little one, for I am the crocodile," and he shed crocodile tears to show it was quite true.

Golu was afraid, but he sat down on the bank and said, "You are the very person I was looking for. Please tell me what you have for dinner."

"Come here, little one, and I'll whisper the answer to you," said the crocodile.

Golu put his head down close to the crocodile's snout and the crocodile caught him by the nose.

"I think," said the crocodile, "today a baby elephant will be my dinner."

"Let me go. You are hurting me, Mr Crocodile," screamed Golu.

The python, who had been quietly following Golu, came to the bank and said, "If you do not pull as hard as you can, the crocodile will drag you into the stream."

Golu sat back on his little haunches and pulled and pulled. The crocodile slipped into the water making it all creamy with great sweeps of his tail, and he also pulled and pulled.

Then the python coiled himself round Golu's stomach and said, "Let's pull harder." Golu dug in all his four legs in the mud and pulled. The nose kept on stretching. At each pull the nose grew longer and longer and it hurt Golu. The nose was now five feet long, but it was free at last.

Golu sat down, with his nose wrapped up in a big banana leaf and hung it in the great, grassy Limpopo river to cool.

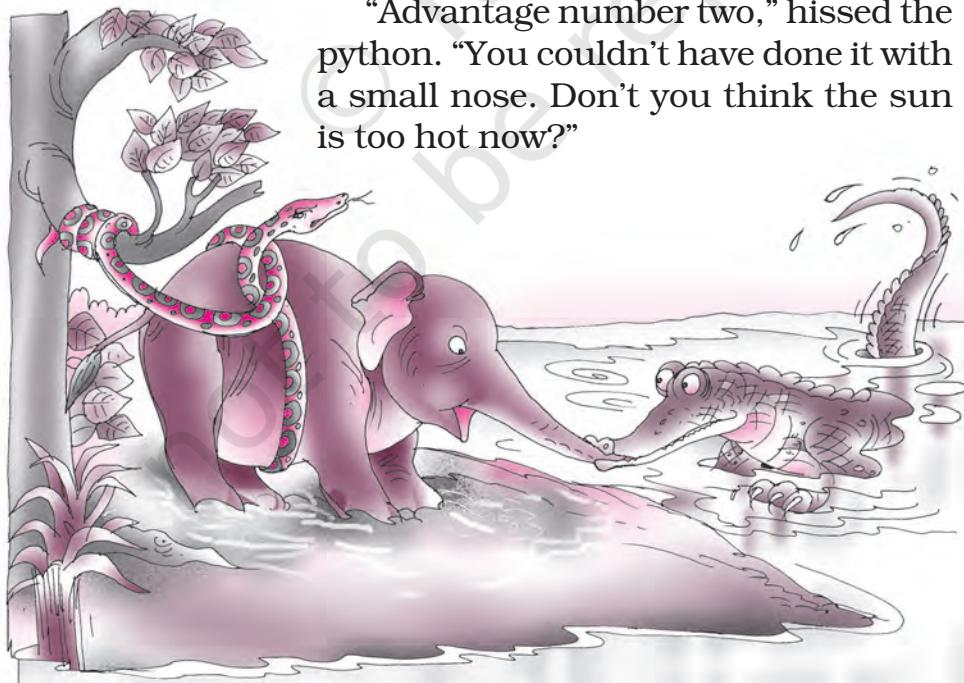
Golu sat there for two days waiting for his nose to cool and to shrink. It grew cool but it didn't shrink.

At the end of the second day, a fly came and stung Golu on the shoulder. Golu lifted his long nose (trunk) and with it hit the fly dead.

"Advantage number one," hissed the python. "You couldn't have done it with a small nose. Try and eat a little now."

Golu put out his trunk and plucked a large bundle of grass. He dusted it against his forelegs and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Advantage number two," hissed the python. "You couldn't have done it with a small nose. Don't you think the sun is too hot now?"





Golu scooped up some mud from the bank and slapped it on his head.

“Advantage number three,” hissed the python. “You couldn’t have done it with a small nose.”

“Thank you, Mr Python,” said Golu gratefully. “I’ll remember all this and now I’ll go back to my family.”

RUDYARD KIPLING
(simplified and abridged)

Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. Whom does Golu ask, “Why don’t you ever fly like other birds?”
2. Which uncle of Golu had red eyes?
3. Golu’s relatives did not answer his questions because
 - (i) they were shy.
 - (ii) the questions were too difficult.
 - (iii) Golu was a naughty baby.

4. Who advised Golu to go to the Limpopo river?
5. Why did Golu go to the river?
6. The crocodile lay on the bank of the Limpopo river. Golu thought it was
 - (i) a living crocodile.
 - (ii) a dead crocodile.
 - (iii) a log of wood.
7. What did the crocodile do to show that it was a real crocodile?
8. "Come here, little one, and I'll whisper the answer to you." The crocodile said this because
 - (i) he couldn't stand up.
 - (ii) he wanted to eat Golu.
 - (iii) Golu was deaf.
9. Who helped Golu on the bank of the river?
10. Name two things the elephant can do with his trunk, and two he cannot.



Laughter at Sea

A passenger boat was moving slowly in a thick fog.
On deck an old man, rather frightened, asked a sailor,
"How far are we from land?"
"Half a mile," he answered.
"Where?" said the old man.
"Straight down," was the reply.



0754CH06

6

I Want Something in a Cage



- ★ Mr Purcell owns a pet shop.
- ★ There is constant noise of screeching and twittering in the shop, but Mr Purcell is happily unaware of it.
- ★ One cold morning, a strange customer calls.

MR PURCELL did not believe in ghosts. Nevertheless, the man who bought the two doves, and his strange act immediately thereafter, left him with a distinct sense of the uncanny. As though, behind his departed customer, there had lingered the musty smell of an abandoned, haunted house.

Mr Purcell was a small, fussy man; red cheeks and a tight, melon stomach. Large glasses magnified his eyes so as to give him the appearance of a wise and genial owl. He owned a pet shop. He sold cats and dogs and monkeys; he dealt in fish food and bird seed, prescribed remedies for ailing canaries, and displayed on his shelves long rows of ornate and gilded cages. He considered himself something of a professional man.

A constant stir of movement pervaded his shop; whispered twitters, sly rustling; squeals, cheeps, and sudden squeaks. Small feet scampered in frantic circles —

uncanny: unusual **magnified:** made to appear big **canary:** a small, bright yellow bird noted for its singing

frightened, bewildered, blindly seeking. Across the shelves pulsed this endless flicker of life. But the customers who came in said, "Aren't they cute? Look at that little cage! They're sweet." And Mr Purcell himself would smile and briskly rub his hands and emphatically shake his head.

Each morning, when the routine of opening his shop was completed, it was the proprietor's custom to perch on a high stool, behind the counter, unfold his morning paper, and digest the day's news. As he read he would smirk, frown, reflectively purse his lips, knowingly lift his eyebrows, nod in grave agreement. He read everything, even advice to the lovelorn and the detailed columns of advertisements.

It was a rough day. A strong wind blew against the high, plate-glass windows. Smoke filmed the wintry city and the



perch: sit **digest:** read and understand fully

air was grey with a thick frost. Having completed his usual tasks, Mr Purcell again mounted the high stool, and unfolded his morning paper. He adjusted his glasses, and glanced at the day's headlines. Chirping and squeaking and mewing vibrated all around him; yet Mr Purcell heard it no more than he would have heard the monotonous ticking of a familiar clock.

There was a bell over the door that jingled whenever a customer entered. This morning, however, for the first time Mr Purcell could recall, it failed to ring. Simply he glanced up, and there was the stranger, standing just inside the door, as if he had materialised out of thin air.

The storekeeper slid off his stool. From the first instant he knew instinctively, unreasonably, that the man hated him; but out of habit he rubbed his hands briskly together, smiled and nodded.

"Good morning," he beamed. "What can I do for you?"

Comprehension Check

1. Write 'True' or 'False' against each of following statements.
 - (i) Mr Purcell sold birds, cats, dogs and monkeys. _____
 - (ii) He was very concerned about the well-being of the birds and animals in his shop. _____
 - (iii) He was impressed by the customer who bought the two doves. _____
 - (iv) He was a successful shopowner, though insensitive and cold as a person. _____
2. Why is Mr Purcell compared to an owl?
3. From the third paragraph pick out
 - (i) words associated with cries of birds,
 - (ii) words associated with noise,
 - (iii) words suggestive of confusion and fear.

4. "...Mr Purcell heard it no more than he would have heard the monotonous ticking of a familiar clock." (Read para beginning with "It was a rough day...")

- (i) What does 'it' refer to?
- (ii) Why does Mr Purcell not hear 'it' clearly?

- ★ The customer wants something that has wings.
- ★ He spends his ten years' earning on a pair of birds.
- ★ What he does after buying the birds is the strangest act Mr Purcell has ever seen.

The man's shiny shoes squeaked forward. His suit was cheap, ill-fitting but obviously new. He had a shuttling glance and close-cropped hair. Ignoring Purcell for the moment, he rolled his gaze around the shadowy shop.

"A nasty morning," volunteered the shopkeeper. He clasped both hands across his melon-like stomach, and smiled importantly. "I see by the paper we're in for a cold spell. Now what was it you wanted?"

The man stared closely at Mr Purcell, as though just now aware of his presence. He said, "I want something in a cage."

"Something in a cage?" Mr Purcell was a bit confused, "You mean—some sort of pet?"

"I mean what I said," snapped the man. "Something in a cage. Something that is small."

"I see," hastened the storekeeper, not at all certain that he did. His eyes narrowed gravely and he pursed his lips. "Now let me think. A white rat, perhaps? I have some very nice white rats."

"No," said the man. "Not rats. Something with wings. Something that flies."

"A bird!" exclaimed Mr Purcell.



shuttling glance: constantly looking to and fro **snapped:** said angrily

"A bird's all right." The customer pointed suddenly to a suspended cage which contained two snowy birds. "Doves? How much for those?"

"Five-fifty," came the prompt answer. "And a very reasonable price. They are a fine pair."

"Five-fifty?" The man was obviously crestfallen. He hesitantly produced a five dollar bill. "I'd like to have these birds. But this is all I've got. Just five dollars."

Mentally, Mr Purcell made a quick calculation, which told him that at a fifty cent reduction he could still reap a tidy profit. He smiled magnanimously.

"My dear man, if you want them that badly, you can certainly have them for five dollars."

"I'll take them." He laid his five dollars on the counter. Mr Purcell tottered on tiptoe, unhooked the cage, and handed it to his customer. The man cocked his head to one side, listening to the constant chittering, the rushing scurry of the shop. "That noise," he blurted. "Doesn't it get you?"

"Noise? What noise?" Mr Purcell looked surprised. He could hear nothing unusual.

The customer glared. "I mean all this caged stuff. Drives you crazy, doesn't it?"

Mr Purcell drew back. Either the man was insane, or drunk. He said hastily, "Yes, yes. Certainly, I guess so."

"Listen." The staring eyes came closer. "How long d'you think it took me to make the five dollars?"

The merchant wanted to order him out of the shop. But, oddly enough, he couldn't. He heard himself dutifully asking, "Why—why, how long did it take you?"

The other laughed. "Ten years—at hard labour. Ten years to earn five dollars. Fifty cents a year."

It was best, Purcell decided, to humour him. "My, my; ten years. That's certainly a long time. Now..."

snowy: white **crestfallen:** disappointed **magnanimously:** generously (He smiled a broad smile.) **tottered:** moved unsteadily

“They give you five dollars,” laughed the man, “and a cheap suit, and tell you not to get caught again.”

Mr Purcell mopped his sweating brow. “Now, about the care and feeding of your doves. I would advise...”

“Bah!” The man swung around, and stalked abruptly from the store. Purcell sighed with sudden relief. He waddled to the window and stared out. Just outside, his peculiar customer had halted. He was holding the cage shoulder-high, staring at his purchase. Then, opening the cage, he reached inside and drew out one of the doves. He tossed it into the air. He drew out the second and tossed it after the first. They rose like windblown balls of fluff and were lost in the smoky grey of the wintry city. For an instant the liberator’s silent and lifted gaze watched after them. Then he dropped the cage. He shoved both hands deep in his



41

I Want Something in a Cage



mopped: wiped

trouser pockets, hunched down his head and shuffled away. The merchant's brow was puckered with perplexity. So desperately had the man desired the doves that he had let him have them at a reduced price. And immediately he had turned them loose. "Now why," Mr Purcell muttered, "did he do that?" He felt vaguely insulted.

L.E. GREEVE

Comprehension Check

1. Do you think the atmosphere of Mr Purcell's shop was cheerful or depressing? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Describe the stranger who came to the pet shop. What did he want?
3. (i) The man insisted on buying the doves because he was fond of birds. Do you agree?
(ii) How had he earned the five dollars he had?
4. Was the customer interested in the care and feeding of the doves he had bought? If not, why not?

Exercises

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Why, in your opinion, did the man set the doves free?
2. Why did it make Mr Purcell feel "vaguely insulted"?



0754CH07

7

Chandni



- ★ Abbu Khan kept goats as pets.
- ★ He loved his goats, but they left him one by one.
- ★ He bought a young pretty goat and called her Chandni.

ONCE upon a time there lived an old man in Almora. He was popularly known as Abbu Khan. He lived all alone except for a few goats which he always kept as pets. He gave his goats funny names such as Kalua, Moongia or Gujri. He would take them out for grazing during the day and talk to them as one talks to one's own children; at night he would bring them back to his little hut and put a string round the neck of each goat.

Poor Abbu Khan was a little unlucky in the matter of his goats. Very often at night one of the goats would pull and pull at the string till it broke loose, and then would disappear in the hills beyond. Goats in hilly regions hate being tied to trees or poles. They love their freedom. Abbu Khan's goats were of the best hill breed. They too loved their freedom. So whenever they got the chance, they would run away only to get killed by an old wolf who lived in the hills.

Whenever one of his goats disappeared, Abbu Khan was very sad. He did not understand why even the juiciest grass and grains that he gave them, and all the love that he



showered on them, would not stop these unfortunate goats from running straight into the jaws of death. Are these goats mad, he wondered! Or was it their love for freedom! But freedom meant struggle, hardship, even death. Abbu Khan couldn't solve the mystery.

One day, when all his goats had left him, Abbu Khan said to himself, "No more goats in my house ever again. I may yet live for a few more years but I'll live without goats." However, the poor old man was terribly lonely. He simply couldn't do without his pets. Very soon he bought a young goat. He thought, "A young goat will stay with me much longer. She will soon begin to love me as well as the food I give her every day. She will never want to go to the hills." And he laughed with joy.

The new goat was very pretty. She was white as snow, and had two little horns on her little head, and a pair of



gleaming red eyes. She had a friendly temperament, and would listen to Abbu Khan's tales with a lot of interest and affection. Abbu Khan called her Chandni, which means 'moonlight'. He loved Chandni and would narrate to her stories of all his friends who were dead and gone.

Several years passed; Chandni was still there. Abbu Khan believed that Chandni would never leave his compound for the free and fresh air of the hills beyond. Alas! he was mistaken again.

Comprehension Check

1. Why did Abbu Khan's goats want to run away? What happened to them in the hills?
2. Abbu Khan said, "No more goats in my house ever again." Then he changed his mind. Why?
3. Why did he buy a young goat?

- ★ Like other goats, Chandni too missed the hills.
- ★ She told Abbu Khan she must have her freedom.
- ★ The story of the dangerous wolf in the forest did not discourage Chandni.

Every morning Chandni watched the hilltops bathed in the sunlight. "How beautiful those hills are!" she thought. "How refreshing the breeze that blows through them! And how lovely to run across those green fields!" She ran towards the hills but had to stop with a jerk—the rope round her neck wouldn't let her go any further. How she hated that rope!

She stopped eating the green grass Abbu Khan brought for her; nor did she listen to his stories with interest and affection. She lost her appetite, grew very thin and stared moodily at the hilltops bathed in sunlight. Abbu Khan did not understand Chandni's anguish. At last, she decided to speak to him frankly. "Dear Abbu Khan," she said, "let me go to the hills, please. If I stay on in your compound, I'll die." Now Abbu Khan understood Chandni's problem, but it made him very unhappy. The earthen pot which contained Chandni's breakfast fell from his hands and broke into a thousand pieces.

"Why do you want to leave me, Chandni?" Abbu Khan asked.

"I want to go to the hills," Chandni answered.

"Don't you like the food here? I'll give you tastier food and a much longer rope."

"No, thank you. Let me go to the hills."

"Do you realise the risk you are running, you obstinate creature? There is a dangerous wolf in the hills. He'll eat you up." Abbu Khan did his best to warn her.

Chandni answered, "God has given me a pair of horns. I'll fight the wolf."

“Fight the wolf, indeed! Have you forgotten the story of your sister Kalua who was the size of a big deer. She fought the wolf through the night but was killed in the morning.”
Abbu Khan narrated Kalua’s story for the fiftieth time.



47

Chandni





To all this Chandni had only one thing to say: "I want to go to the hills."

Abbu Khan got very annoyed. He thundered, "You are not going anywhere. From today you'll live in a small hut, and not move about freely in the compound. Ungrateful as you are, you must still be saved from the wolf." He pushed her into a small hut and shut the door. But he forgot to close the small window at the back. The same night Chandni made that window her passage to freedom.

Comprehension Check

1. Why did Chandni hate the rope round her neck?
2. "Now Abbu Khan understood Chandni's problem..." What was Chandni's problem?
3. Abbu Khan pushed Chandni into a small hut. This shows that he
 - (i) was cruel.
 - (ii) loved her and wanted to save her life.
 - (iii) was selfish.

- ★ Chandni went back to the hills.
- ★ She knew the wolf was somewhere there.
- ★ She was ready to put up a good fight.

Chandni reached the hills. It seemed to her that the old hills were standing in a row to welcome her. She felt like a child meeting her parents after years of separation. Wherever she went, the tall grass rose to embrace her, the flowers bloomed to amuse her and the wind sang an endless song of welcome. How different all this was from her past in the prison-house of Abbu Khan's compound! It was the happiest day in Chandni's life.

That day she played for hours on the grassy slopes of the hills. She met a herd of wild goats who asked her to join their group. But Chandni politely refused. She wanted to enjoy her new freedom all by herself.

The sun disappeared behind the hills, and soon darkness enveloped the grass, the flowers and the trees. The wind stopped blowing, and there was stillness all around except for a strange sound which was coming from the bushes. The sound was like a grunt. What was it? It wasn't Abbu Khan's voice calling her back to the compound; nor was it the voice of another goat. Then Chandni thought of the dangerous wolf who lived in the hills. She felt scared.





Should she go back to the safety of Abbu Khan's hut? "No," she said to herself, "death in an open field is far better than life in a small hut". The wolf had come out of the bushes, and was staring greedily at Chandni. His eyes were shining like burning coals in the darkness. He seemed in no hurry. He knew the new goat was his.

The wolf and the goat sized up each other. The wolf was big and ferocious whereas the goat, though healthy, was small. But small is not weak. Chandni stood firm on her legs, head slightly bent and horns jutting out. She was a picture of courage. She looked like a brave soldier ready to fight a treacherous enemy. "I must put up a good fight," Chandni thought; "success or failure is a matter of luck or chance."

The fight began. It went on through the night. The moon, which had been watching the fight, began to grow pale and



suddenly hid behind the clouds. The stars also began to disappear one by one. A faint light appeared in the east and the morning call for prayer came from a distant mosque.

The first rays of the sun saw Chandni lying on the ground. She was completely soaked in blood. The wolf, tired and sleepy, was getting ready to devour her.

An assembly of birds perched on top of a tree nearby was debating the result of the fight. "Who is the winner?" one of them asked. "The wolf, of course," most of them said. A wise old bird declaimed with confidence, "Chandni is the winner."

ZAKIR HUSAIN
(an adaptation)

Comprehension Check

1. Why did Chandni refuse to join the group of wild goats?
2. Chandni fought the wolf because she
 - (i) was stronger than the wolf.
 - (ii) hated the wolf.
 - (iii) had to retain her freedom at all costs.

51

Chandni

Exercises

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Why did the wise old bird say, "Chandni is the winner"?
2. "Death in an open field is better than life in a small hut," Chandni said to herself. Was it the right decision? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Freedom is life. Discuss this with reference to 'Chandni' and 'I Want Something in a Cage'.



0754CH08

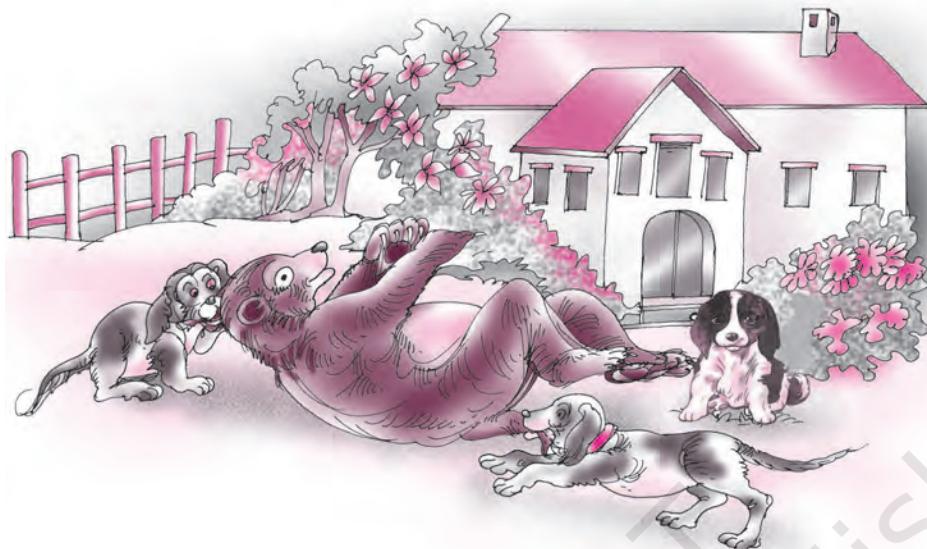
8



The Bear Story

- ★ The lady in the manor-house had a bear as pet.
- ★ It was a most friendly bear, who loved vegetables, apples and honey.
- ★ He roamed freely during the day, but was put on the chain at night.

THERE was once a lady who lived in an old manor-house on the border of a big forest. This lady had a pet bear she was very fond of. It had been found in the forest, half dead of hunger, so small and helpless that it had to be brought up on the bottle by the lady and the old cook. This was several years ago and now it had grown up to a big bear, so big and strong that he could have slain a cow and carried it away between his two paws if he had wanted to. But he did not want to; he was a most amiable bear who did not dream of harming anybody, man or beast. He used to sit outside his kennel and look with his small intelligent eyes most amicably at the cattle grazing in the field near by. The three shaggy mountain ponies in the stable knew him well and did not mind in the least when he shuffled into the stable with his mistress. The children used to ride on his back and had more than once been found asleep in his kennel between his two paws. The three dogs loved to play all sorts of games with him, pull his ears and his stump of a tail



and tease him in every way, but he did not mind it in the least. He had never tasted meat; he ate the same food as the dogs and often out of the same plate—bread, porridge, potato, cabbage, turnip. He had a fine appetite, and his friend, the cook, saw to it that he got his fill. Bears are vegetarians if they have a chance, and fruit is what they like best. In the autumn he used to sit and look with wistful eyes at the ripening apples in the orchard, and in his young days he had been sometimes unable to resist the temptation to climb the tree and help himself to a handful of them. Bears look clumsy and slow in their movements, but try a bear with an apple tree and you will soon find out that he can easily beat any school boy at that game. Now he had learnt that it was against the law, but he kept his small eyes wide open for any apples that fell to the ground. There had also been some difficulties about the beehives; he had been punished for this by being put on the chain for two days with a bleeding nose and he had never done it again. Otherwise he was never put on the chain except for the

night and quite rightly so, for a bear, like a dog, is apt to get somewhat ill-tempered if kept on the chain, and no wonder.

- ★ **The lady visited her sister every Sunday, leaving the bear on the chain the whole afternoon.**
- ★ **One Sunday, while walking through the dense forest, she found him following her.**
- ★ **She was so angry with the disobedient bear that she hit him on the nose with her umbrella. But the bear was really friendly...**

He was also put on the chain on Sundays when his mistress went to spend the afternoon with her married sister who lived in a solitary house on the other side of the mountain-lake, a good hour's walk through the dense forest. It was not supposed to be good for him to wander about in the forest with all its temptations; it was better to be on the safe side. He was also a bad sailor and had once taken such a fright at a sudden gust of wind that he had upset the boat and he and his mistress had to swim to the shore. Now he knew quite well what it meant when his mistress put him on the chain on Sundays, with a friendly tap on his head and the promise of an apple on her return if he had been good during her absence. He was sorry but resigned, like a good dog, when his mistress tells him he cannot come with her for a walk.

One Sunday when the lady had chained him up as usual and was about half-way through the forest, she suddenly thought she heard the cracking of a tree-branch on the winding footpath behind her. She looked back and was horrified to see the bear coming along full speed. Bears look as if they move along quite slowly but they shuffle along much faster than a trotting horse. In a minute he had joined her, panting and sniffing, to take up his usual

place, dog-fashion, at her heels. The lady was very angry, she was already late for lunch, there was no time to take him back home, she did not want him to come with her, and, besides, it was very naughty of him to have disobeyed her. She told him in her severest voice to go back at once, menacing him with her parasol. He stopped a moment and looked at her with his cunning eyes, but did not want to go back and kept on sniffing at her. When the lady saw that he had even lost his new collar, she got still more angry and hit him on the nose with her parasol so hard that it broke in two. He stopped again, shook his head and opened his big mouth several times as if he wanted to say something. Then he turned round and began to shuffle



55

The Bear Story



parasol: umbrella



back the way he had come stopping now and then to look at the lady till at last she lost sight of him.

When the lady came home in the evening, the bear was sitting in his usual place outside his kennel looking very sorry for himself. The lady was still very angry. She went up to him and began to scold him most severely and said he would have to be chained for two more days. The old cook who loved the bear as if he had been her son rushed out from the kitchen very angry.

“What are you scolding him for, missus,” said the cook; “he has been as good as gold the whole day, bless him! He has been sitting here quite still on his haunches as meek as an angel, looking the whole time towards the gate for you to come back.”

AXEL MUNTHE

Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. Where did the lady find the bear cub? How did she bring it up?
2. The bear grew up but “he was a most amiable bear”. Give three examples to prove this.
3. What did the bear eat? There were two things he was not allowed to do. What were they?
4. When was the bear tied up with a chain? Why?
5. What happened one Sunday when the lady was going to her sister’s house? What did the lady do? What was the bear’s reaction?
6. Why was the bear looking sorry for himself in the evening? Why did the cook get angry with her mistress?

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Most people keep dogs and cats as pets. Can you think of some unusual pets that people keep?
2. The second bear did not attack the lady because he was afraid of her. Do you agree?

Whose Side?

Once during the American Civil War a woman said to Abraham Lincoln, “Oh, Mr President, I feel so sure God is on our side, don’t you?”

“Ma’ am,” said the President, “what should be of greater concern to us is whether we are on God’s side.”



0754CH09

9

A Tiger in the House



- ★ Grandfather finds a tiny tiger-cub in the forest and brings him home.
- ★ Grandmother calls him Timothy and brings him up like a human child.
- ★ Timothy is playful and naughty. His companions are Toto, the monkey, a puppy and other members of the household.

TIMOTHY, the tiger-cub, was discovered by Grandfather in the Terai jungle near Dehra.

One day, when Grandfather was strolling down the forest path at some distance from the rest of the party, he discovered a little tiger about eighteen inches long, hiding among the intricate roots of a banyan tree. Grandfather picked him up, and brought him home. He had the distinction of being the only member of the party to have bagged any game, dead or alive.

At first the tiger-cub, who was named Timothy by Grandmother, was brought up entirely on milk given to him in a feeding-bottle by our cook, Mahmoud. But the milk proved too rich for him, and he was put on a diet of raw mutton and cod-liver oil, to be followed later by a more tempting diet of pigeons and rabbits.

Timothy was provided with two companions—Toto, the monkey, who was bold enough to pull the young tiger by the

tail, and then climb up the curtains if Timothy lost his temper; and a small mongrel puppy, found on the road by Grandfather.

At first Timothy appeared to be quite afraid of the puppy, and darted back with a spring if it came too near. He would make absurd dashes at it with his large forepaws, and then retreat to a ridiculously safe distance. Finally, he allowed the puppy to crawl on his back and rest there!

One of Timothy's favourite amusements was to stalk anyone who would play with him, and so, when I came to live with Grandfather, I became one of the tiger's favourites. With a crafty look in his glittering eyes, and his body crouching, he would creep closer and closer to me, suddenly making a dash for my feet, rolling over on his back and kicking with delight, and pretending to bite my ankles.

He was by this time the size of a full-grown retriever, and when I took him out for walks, people on the road would give us a wide berth. When he pulled hard on his chain, I had difficulty in keeping up with him. His favourite place in the house was the drawing-room, and he would make himself



darted: moved or rushed suddenly **retreat:** go back **stalk:** move stealthily towards **crafty:** cunning **retriever:** a breed of dog (trained to retrieve game in hunting) **give us a wide berth:** keep a safe distance from us

comfortable on the long sofa, reclining there with great dignity, and snarling at anybody who tried to get him off.

Timothy had clean habits, and would scrub his face with his paws exactly like a cat. He slept at night in the cook's quarters, and was always delighted at being let out by him in the morning.

Comprehension Check

1. "He had the distinction of being the only member of the party *to have bagged any game...*"

The phrase in italics means

- (i) Grandfather was the most distinguished member of the party.
- (ii) Grandfather was the only sportsperson in the party.
- (iii) Grandfather was the only successful member of the hunting party.

Mark the right answer.

2. Complete the following sentences.

- (i) Toto climbed up the curtains when _____

_____, I became one of the tiger's favourites.

- (iii) Timothy had clean habits, _____

- ★ As Timothy grows up, he becomes less friendly and rather dangerous.
- ★ Grandfather decides to transfer him to the zoo.
- ★ Six months later, Grandfather pays Timothy a visit. Timothy is happy to see Grandfather. Or is he?

"One of these days," declared Grandmother in her prophetic manner, "we are going to find Timothy sitting on Mahmoud's bed, and no sign of the cook except his clothes and shoes!"



Of course, it never came to that, but when Timothy was about six months old a change came over him; he grew steadily less friendly. When out for a walk with me, he would try to steal away to stalk a cat or someone's pet dog. Sometimes at night we would hear frenzied cackling from the poultry house, and in the morning there would be feathers lying all over the verandah. Timothy had to be chained up more often. And finally, when he began to stalk Mahmoud about the house with what looked like villainous intent, Grandfather decided it was time to transfer him to a zoo.

Reserving a first class compartment for himself and Timothy—no one would share a compartment with them—Grandfather took him to Lucknow where the zoo authorities were only too glad to receive as a gift a well-fed and fairly civilised tiger.

About six months later, when my grandparents were visiting relatives in Lucknow, Grandfather took the opportunity of calling at the zoo to see how Timothy was getting on. I was not there to accompany him but I heard all about it when I returned to Dehra.

Arriving at the zoo, Grandfather made straight for the particular cage in which Timothy had been interned. The tiger was there, crouched in a corner, full-grown and with a magnificent striped coat.

"Hello Timothy!" said Grandfather and put his arm through the bars of the cage.

The tiger approached the bars, and allowed Grandfather to put both hands around his head. Grandfather stroked the tiger's forehead and tickled his ears, and, whenever he growled, smacked him across the mouth, which was his old way of keeping him quiet.

frenzied: loud and frantic **cackling:** noise (made by hens) **villainous intent:** wicked and dangerous plan or idea **interned:** kept **smacked:** hit lightly



He licked Grandfather's hands and only sprang away when a leopard in the next cage snarled at him. Grandfather 'shooed' the leopard away, and the tiger returned to lick his hands; but every now and then the leopard would rush at the bars, and he would slink back to his corner.

A number of people had gathered to watch the reunion when a keeper pushed his way through the crowd and asked Grandfather what he was doing.

"I'm talking to Timothy," said Grandfather. "Weren't you here when I gave him to the zoo six months ago?"

"I haven't been here very long," said the surprised keeper. "Please continue your conversation. But I have never been able to touch him myself, he is always very bad tempered."

"Why don't you put him somewhere else?" suggested Grandfather. "That leopard keeps frightening him. I'll go and see the Superintendent about it."

slink: move noiselessly



Grandfather went in search of the Superintendent of the zoo, but found that he had gone home early; and so, after wandering about the zoo for a little while, he returned to Timothy's cage to say good-bye. It was beginning to get dark.

He had been stroking and slapping Timothy for about five minutes when he found another keeper observing him with some alarm. Grandfather recognised him as the keeper who had been there when Timothy had first come to the zoo.

"You remember me," said Grandfather. "Now why don't you transfer Timothy to another cage, away from this stupid leopard?"

"But— sir—" stammered the keeper, "it is not your tiger."

"I know, I know," said Grandfather. "I realise he is no longer mine. But you might at least take a suggestion or two from me."

"I remember your tiger very well," said the keeper. "He died two months ago."

"Died!" exclaimed Grandfather.

"Yes sir, of pneumonia. This tiger was trapped in the hills only last month, and he is very dangerous!"

Grandfather could think of nothing to say. The tiger was still licking his arm, with increasing relish. Grandfather took what seemed to him an age to withdraw his hand from the cage.

With his face near the tiger's he mumbled, "Goodnight, Timothy," and giving the keeper a scornful look, walked briskly out of the zoo.

63

A Tiger in the House

RUSKIN BOND
(slightly abridged)

Comprehension Check

1. Grandmother's prophecy was that the tiger
 - (i) would prefer Mahmoud's bed to sleep in.
 - (ii) and the cook would disappear together from the house.
 - (iii) would one day make a meal of Mahmoud.Mark the right answer.
2. When Timothy was about six months old, *a change came over him*. The phrase in italics means that
 - (i) Timothy had grown to his full size.
 - (ii) Timothy grew more friendly.
 - (iii) Timothy grew less friendly, in fact more dangerous
3. Write 'True' or 'False' against each of the following statements.
 - (i) Timothy and Grandfather went to Lucknow in a special compartment. _____
 - (ii) The compartment in which Grandfather and Timothy travelled had no other passenger. _____
 - (iii) Timothy and Grandfather travelled in a first class compartment. _____
 - (vi) All passengers in the compartment thought that Timothy was a well-fed and civilised tiger. _____
4. Grandfather suggested that Timothy should be put in another cage. The reason was that
 - (i) the tiger had become very bad tempered.
 - (ii) a leopard in the next cage would constantly rush at Timothy.
 - (iii) the cage was too small for a full grown tiger.
5. The tiger was still licking his arm, *with increasing relish*. The phrase in italics suggests that Timothy
 - (i) was good natured.
 - (ii) recognised an old friend.
 - (iii) smelt fresh food.

Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. Where was the tiger cub hiding when Grandfather found him?
2. (i) What did Toto do to entertain Timothy?
(ii) What did he do when Timothy lost his temper?
3. "I became one of the tiger's favourites". Who is 'T' in the statement? Why did he think so?
4. Where was Timothy most comfortable during the day? Where was he during the night?
5. What was Grandmother's prophecy about the cook? Did it come true?
6. What made Grandfather decide to transfer Timothy to the zoo?
7. Why did Grandfather want Timothy to be put in another enclosure?
8. What shocked Grandfather in the end?

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Shoot animals with a camera, not with a gun.
2. Keeping pets helps us become more loving and tolerant. It also helps us respect life in any form. Do you agree?
3. Have you heard of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)? What do they do?

65

A Tiger in the House

The Competition

"Where's Bill today, Belinda?" asked the teacher.

"In bed, Miss," replied Belinda.

"Is he ill, then? What is the matter with him?" asked the teacher.

"We were having a competition," explained Belinda, "to see who could lean out of the window farthest—and Bill won."



0754CH10

10



An Alien Hand

Before you read

Have you heard of the Viking Mission to Mars?

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Viking Mission to Mars was composed of two spacecraft, Viking 1 and Viking 2, each consisting of an orbiter and a lander. The primary objectives were to obtain images and samples of the Martian surface and soil and search for any possible signs of life. Viking 1 was launched on 20 August 1975 and arrived at Mars on 19 June 1976. Viking 2 was launched on 9 September 1975 and entered Mars' orbit on 7 August 1976.

Besides taking photographs and collecting other science data on the Martian surface, the two landers conducted three biology experiments to look for possible signs of life. As of now, there is no clear evidence of the presence of living microorganisms in the soil near the landing sites.

Now read the story.

- ★ Tiloo and his parents live beneath the surface of a planet under artificial conditions.
- ★ Tiloo has heard and read about the sun and the stars. He has never seen them.
- ★ Tiloo's father goes to work through a secret passage, and Tiloo wants to know all about it.

“TILLOO! How often have you been told not to go that way?”

“But why does Daddy go there every day?”

“Because that’s his job, Tiloo!”

‘That way’ was an underground passage. Tiloo’s father went every day for work along that passage. And every day he came back from that direction. What lay at the end of that forbidden route? Not only Tiloo, but a great majority of the community would have liked to know. Tiloo’s father was one of the select few permitted to go that way. The above conversation invariably took place between Tiloo and his mother whenever he insisted on following his father.

Today, however, was different. Tiloo’s father was enjoying a siesta at home and Tiloo managed to get hold of his security card. Then, evading his watchful mother’s eye, Tiloo made his way to the forbidden passage.

A metal door barred his entry. But Tiloo had watched his father slip the magic card into a slot. He did the same... and the door opened noiselessly. A well-lit passage seemed to beckon him.

Snatching the card which had come out of another slot in the wall, Tiloo started his march along a gentle upward slope—for the passage led from the underground habitat to the surface of the planet. Tiloo looked forward to seeing the sun (if it was daytime) or the stars (if it was night) about which he had heard and read so much.

But alas, that wasn’t to be!

Tiloo had underestimated the security arrangements. Invisible mechanical devices had already detected and photographed the small intruder, sent his picture to the Central Bureau where it was thoroughly checked... And before he had advanced ten paces a strong hand fell heavily on his shoulder. Gently but firmly he was escorted by the

siesta: short rest or nap after lunch **habitat:** shelter or home **detected:** found out **escorted:** taken or led



security staff back home to an anxious and angry mother. While he was being scolded he received help from an unexpected quarter.

“Let me explain to him, darling!” said his father who had just got up. “If he is properly briefed, he will not do such a thing again.” He started to explain.

“Listen, Tiloo! I work on a surface where an ordinary person cannot survive because the air is too thin to breathe and where the temperature is so low that you would freeze to death.”

“But, Daddy, how do you manage to survive?”

“Because I go well-equipped, in a special suit with a reservoir of oxygen. I can keep warm and my boots are specially designed to make it easy for me to walk on the surface. What’s more, I’ve been trained to survive and work on the surface.

“There was a time when our forefathers lived on the surface quite naturally. Indeed they did so for millions of years. But times changed. The very sun, which had provided us with sustenance, turned hostile. It changed only slightly but the change was sufficient to upset the balance of nature on this planet.

“First the birds became extinct. The animals followed. The fish couldn’t bear it anymore either. We managed to survive only because of our superior technology, but we were forced to live underground under artificial conditions. Thanks to solar energy, we can generate sufficient power to make our life comfortable. But the machines which make this possible must always be in good working condition. Some of them are on the surface—I belong to the team whose responsibility it is to keep watch on them and to service them.”

briefed: told or informed

“Daddy, can I join the team when I grow up?”
“Of course, if you want to,” said his father.
“But for that you must be a good boy and do as your parents tell you.” His mother had, as usual, the last word.



Comprehension Check

1. How does Tiloo manage to find his way to the ‘forbidden passage’?
2. What did Tiloo hope to see once he emerged from his underground home?
3. Why did Tiloo’s father advise him not to try to reach the surface of the planet?
4. What changes had occurred, which forced people to live in underground homes?

- ★ The big TV screen in the Control Room shows an alien spacecraft.
- ★ The question whether there is life on other planets exercises everybody’s mind.
- ★ The President of the Central Committee is about to make an important statement.

Next day when Tiloo’s father went to work, he found the Control Room full of excitement. People were crowded round the big TV screen. It showed a dot in an otherwise clear background.

“It isn’t a star—for it’s changing its position. Our computer has given a trajectory for this ‘thing’. It’s heading towards us.” The Supervisor of the last shift explained.

“A spacecraft?” Tiloo’s father asked. By now he was joined by his teammates on the new shift.

“So we think; but it needs watching.”

A spacecraft? Where from? The solar system wasn't known to have any life anywhere else except on their planet. Tilloo's father recalled the ancient days recorded in the archives at the Central Bureau when their ancestors had a well-developed space programme and had searched the solar system with manned and unmanned spacecraft and found that they were indeed 'alone'. Now, in the days of energy shortage and underground life, they had no space programme. They could only watch impotently from their vantage point. Who were these strangers?

The conference room in the Central Bureau was so quiet that an outsider would have thought it was empty. Far from it. It was full to capacity but the members of the Central Committee were unusually quiet. They knew that the President was going to make a momentous announcement.

"Colleagues! I will give you the report as I have it. While I speak there may be a change in the situation," the President paused to get his papers in order and then continued. "Two spacecraft are approaching us. One is in fact orbiting our planet while the other is still far away. We guess that they are coming from our neighbouring planet. How should we react? Number One, your views please."

Number One was in charge of defence. He was known for his courage and wisdom. "Sir, if we wish we can totally destroy these spacecraft with our missiles. But that won't make us any wiser. We do not have the capacity to render these craft unoperational in space; but should they land we can render them ineffective anytime we choose. Our reports say that they do not contain living beings, they only have instruments."

"Number Two, your opinion please," the President asked the scientist on the committee.

"I recommend non-interference and passive observation. Since we do not know the power of the senders of these



spacecraft, and we are still in the dark about their intentions, it is wise not to reveal our existence. If we destroy these spaceships or render them ineffective, we might reveal our existence."

The President looked at Number Three, a social scientist. He rarely agreed with Number Two. But this was one of those rare occasions when he did.

"I agree with Number Two, sir. In fact I will go so far as to say that we should keep our surface activities to the minimum, thus creating the impression that there's no life on this planet. Fortunately, our surface conditions do give that impression."

Before the President could speak his personal telephone rang. He lifted the receiver and listened quietly for a minute.

"Colleagues!" he announced, "the first spacecraft has landed."

Comprehension Check

1. Why was everyone in the Control Room greatly excited?
2. Was the spacecraft manned or unmanned? How do you know it?
3. What did Number One and Number Two suggest should be done about the alien spacecraft?

- ★ Tiloo accompanies his father to the Control Room.
- ★ In his excitement, he presses the all-important red button on the panel, and the mechanical hand from the alien spacecraft stops working.
- ★ The mechanical hand is activated again, but it finds no signs of life on that planet.

It was a red letter day in Tiloo's life—the day he was waiting for. For his father had at last taken him to the

Control Room. From here he could see the alien spacecraft on his TV screen.

“What a funny looking thing, Daddy! What does it contain?” Tiloo asked.

His father shook his head, “Can’t say for sure. We are only allowed to observe it from far. But we control all its parts and can exercise our power if it is up to any mischief.” He pointed to an impressive panel with several coloured buttons on it. Tiloo looked at them wistfully.

“Look, it’s up to something, Daddy,” Tiloo suddenly noted some movement in the spacecraft. Others in the Control Room saw it too. All eyes were now glued to the screen.

A mechanical hand was emerging from the spacecraft. It was approaching the surface of the planet. It bent and touched the soil. What was it up to? People crowded towards the screen for a closer look. The telescopic lens of the TV camera zoomed in to the tip of the mechanical hand.

Tiloo was staring at the control panel and its attractive buttons. An irresistible desire got hold of him to press the most prominent of all buttons, the red one. He moved...

There was a shrill whistle and Tiloo found himself the centre of attention. His father pulled him away roughly and restored the red button to neutral position. But the damage was done.

The mechanical hand from the spacecraft ceased to work.

At a press conference held by NASA, a scientist was briefing the world press:

... Everything has been going on smoothly with the Viking Mission. There is a small hitch. The mechanical hand which was to dig out the Martian soil for examination has developed a malfunction... We don’t know the cause but our technicians are confident they’ll sort it out...

And shortly afterwards there was another press release from NASA:

... The mechanical hand is working again, thanks to the efforts of our technicians. Soil samples are being collected and examined... Soon we will know the answer to the question whether there is life on Mars.

Life on Mars? Of all the planets in our solar system, Mars is nearest in location and physical conditions to our Earth. So the scientists behind the Viking Mission were hopeful of finding life on Mars. But they were in for a disappointment.

The Viking Mission found no signs of life on Mars.

JAYANT NARLIKAR

Comprehension Check

1. What do you think the mechanical hand was trying to do?
2. Tiloo pressed the red button and “the damage was done”. What was the damage?
3. Where had the spacecraft come from?
4. On which planet do Tiloo and his parents live?

73

An Alien Hand

Exercises

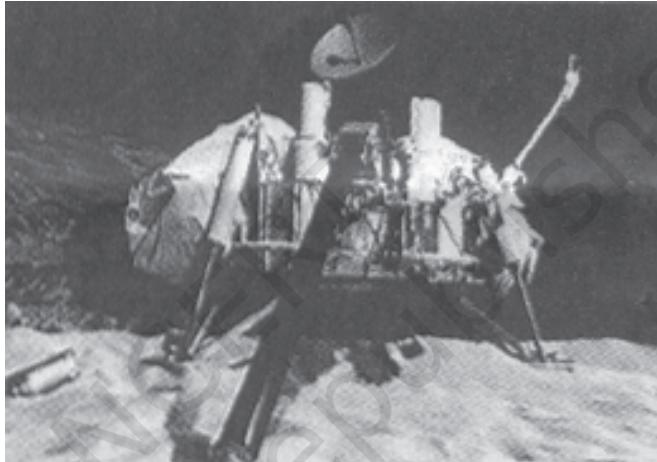
Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. If you had to live in a home like Tiloo’s, what parts of life would you find most difficult? What compensations might there be?
2. What, if anything, might drive mankind to make their homes underground?
3. Do you think there is life on other planets? Can you guess what kind of people there may be on them? In what ways are they likely to be different from us?

MARTIAN PROBES MAY HAVE KILLED MIRCOBES

Two NASA space probes that visited Mars 30 years ago may have stumbled upon alien microbes on the Red Planet and inadvertently killed them, a scientist has theorised in a paper.

The problem was the Viking space probes of 1976–77 were looking for the wrong kind of life and did not recognise it, the researcher said in a paper presented at a meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Seattle on Sunday.



This news report, based on a more expansive view of where life can take root, may have NASA looking for a different type of Martian life form when its next Mars spacecraft is launched later this year, one of the space agency's top scientists told reporters.

Last month, scientists excitedly reported that new photographs of Mars showed geologic changes that suggest water occasionally flows there — the most tantalising sign that Mars is hospitable to life.

(From a recent newspaper report)